

Outreach worker turns personal tragedy into motivation to help others

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Professor Madya Dr Azlinda Azman the Convenor of AIDS Action & Research Group (AARG) during the Drug and HIV/AIDS Symposium at University Sains Malaysia. With her are AARG Outreach Officer Othman Abd Rahim and Paul Lee.

GEORGE TOWN: The death of his brother from a drug overdose was the wake-up call for Othman Abdul Rahim, 52, to begin the process to turn his life around.

Sharing his story at a forum on drug abuse, HIV and AIDS today, the outreach worker said he had been abusing drugs for the past 15 years.

He said he decided to turn over a new leaf following the shocking death of his younger brother a few years and and has since join AIDS Action and Research Group (AARG) to raise awareness.

As at outreach worker, Othman said one of his tasks was to minimise the risk of disease transmission among drug addicts.

He said this can be done via the Needle and Syringe Exchange Program (NSEP) which was launched in 2006 by the Health Ministry.

"An outreach workers will go get the drug addicts to exchange their needles for new ones twice a week, this is how the risk of infection is minimise as addicts like to share their needles," he said.

His colleague, Paul Lee, 54, described himself as a rebel during his younger days but that his time going in and out of prison and several drug rehabilitation stints has taught him valuable life lessons to stay clean.

He said his former experience as a drug addict helped in his new role now as an outreach worker which made the work easier in trying to turn the life of a drug addict around.

"We can approach and befriend them, that is how we are able to work with them," he added at the symposium organised by AARG USM to raise awareness of the dangers of drug abuse in conjunction with World AIDS Day 2015.